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SUBJECT: UNESCO: PREPARATIONS FOR JULY 2006 VILNIUS
WORLD HERITAGE MEETING INCLUDE EXPERTS' DISCUSSION ON
CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACT ON SITES

1. Summary: In preparation for the July 8-16 2006 meeting of the World Heritage Committee in Vilnius, invited experts met at UNESCO headquarters to discuss the impact of climate change on World Heritage sites; (Their recommendations para 5). The meeting was held at the request of the July 2005 session of the World Heritage Committee. There was interest on the part of a couple of members of the media in a U.S. position paper -- submitted in advance to the World Heritage Center, but not delivered at the meeting -- by U.S. expert Interior Department DAS Paul Hoffman expressing U.S. concerns regarding UNESCO's appropriate role in areas involving climate issues and World Heritage sites. Also in preparation for the upcoming Vilnius meeting, the chair of the World Heritage Committee convened an informal meeting to discuss the agenda at Vilnius; the chair (Lithuania) also used the meeting to express her concern about Russia's plans to build a pipeline near the Lake Baikal World Heritage site. End Summary.

Experts Meet on Climate Change and World Heritage

2. In preparation for the July 2006 World Heritage Committee meeting in Vilnius, Lithuania, the World Heritage Center organized an experts' only meeting March 16-17 2006 to examine the impact of climate change on World Heritage Sites. The U.S. was represented at the meeting by experts Paul Hoffman, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Interior, and Daniel Fagre, U.S. Geological Survey. Ambassador Oliver and USUNESCO Science Officer also attended the meeting.

3. This meeting was held at the request of the 29th session (July 2005) of the World Heritage Committee, in order to explore the appropriate role of World Heritage with regard to climate change. Decision 29 COM 7B.a set out specific goals to guide the experts' meeting and its report back to the Committee, although there remained some confusion about the Meeting's purpose with respect to the Petition to include four World Heritage Sites on the List of World Heritage in Danger (Note: A subsequent petition was submitted in February 2006, suggesting that Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park be included on the List of World Heritage in Danger as well. End Note.)

4. The meeting included a number of presentations about the impact of climate change on both natural and cultural sites. A presentation by Martin Parry, of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, suggested that certain climatic trends, such as average global temperature rise, potential sea level rise, potential increased severities of droughts complicated by increased rainfall and storm intensities, were very likely to occur over the next 100 years even if GHG emissions were reduced at twice the rate articulated in the Kyoto Protocol.

5. The participating experts had significant discussions about the appropriate role of the World Heritage Convention with regard to the issue of climate change. The experts arrived at consensus, with the noted exception of one of the climate change petitioning NGO representatives. The consensus suggested that the appropriate role of World Heritage should be guided by the following principles:

World Heritage should adopt the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change terminology with respect to "mitigations" meaning reduction in GHG emissions or carbon sequestration and "adaptations" meaning efforts to reduce, eliminate, adjust to, or adapt to the impacts that result from climate change;

The larger issue of GHG emission mitigations remains

the responsibility of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change;

World Heritage Sites should monitor climate change impacts and coordinate those efforts on a thematic as well as regional basis;

Site managers should conduct monitoring and research on climate change impacts to World Heritage Sites;

Site managers should carry out activities that will facilitate the adaptation of a site to climate change impacts;

Site managers and the World Heritage Centre should closely coordinate all these efforts with other conservation conventions and organizations;

Site managers and State parties should share all information with the World Heritage Center and UNESCO which would serve as the clearinghouse for climate change impacts and adaptations information; and

UNESCO and the World Heritage Centre should share climate change impact information with the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change to inform their policy making process on mitigations and adaptations.

16. Before the meeting opened, one of our Secretariat contacts said that she and her colleagues were striving to ensure a "low profile" for these proceedings to ensure that they remained at a technical level. The consensus at which the experts arrived will not be made public until six weeks before the Vilnius meeting, along with all the other documents for the meeting. Members of Permanent delegations that did not have experts participating were told that the Meeting was "closed". However, the Ecological and Earth Sciences Division of the Natural Sciences Sector seized upon the opportunity afforded by the World Heritage meeting on Climate Change to organize a meeting on Bio-Carbon Sequestration immediately preceding the WHC meeting, inviting many of the same participants. The carbon meeting, organized in partnership with the NGO Pro-Natura, was an opportunity to discuss ways to enhance efforts to address the potential reduction of biological sources of green house gas (GHG) emissions by reducing deforestation, increasing reforestation, sequestration of carbon, and establishing partnerships with the private sector. This meeting -- not organized under any specific delegation of authority, and lacking the authority to set official policy for any organization -- issued no communique.

Ambassadors Meet to Prepare Vilnius Agenda

17. On March 23, Ambassador Oliver attended a meeting of Permanent Delegates to prepare for the Vilnius Meeting. In discussing the agenda, Ambassador Oliver succeeded in convincing the other participants that the time allotted to discussion of the administration and financing of the World Heritage Center should be expanded considerably. The U.S. also argued that the issues of universal value and geographical distribution should be discussed before the Committee decides which new sites should be inscribed on the World Heritage List. This suggestion was not accepted, as many permanent delegates argued that high-level representatives of their countries - who plan to attend the meeting to press for their sites' inclusion -- have already made travel plans based on the agenda as currently configured.

18. Much of discussion was devoted to the potentially negative impact of a proposed oil pipeline that would be built near Lake Baikal, Russia, inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1996. The current Chairperson of the World Heritage Committee, Ina Marciulionyte (the Lithuanian Ambassador to UNESCO), reported to the meeting that she had written a letter to Russian President Putin protesting these plans; she said that she had asked UNESCO DG Matsuura to write a similar letter, but that he had not committed himself to doing so. Amb. Marciulionyte also evoked the possibility of holding an extraordinary session of the World Heritage Committee to discuss this issue - which would probably take place sometime after the July 2006 World Heritage Committee in Vilnius - given the complexity of the issues involved. She stressed, though, that opponents of the Russian plan did not want to block the pipeline, but change its routing to avoid any potential harm to Lake Baikal.
Oliver